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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/11/2018

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SUBJECT: NINEWA: YEZIDI SPIRITUAL LEADER PLEADS FOR HIS  
COMMUNITY TO REMAIN UNDER THE KRG

Classified By: Ninewa PRT Leader Alex Laskaris for reasons 1.4 (b&d).

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

¶1. (C) Summary: The spiritual leader of the Yezidi faith told us that his community's security depends on its remaining within the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) area. Citing the KRG's commitment to secular governance and its superior record of ensuring religious minority rights, he pleaded with the USG to ensure that all Yezidi areas, including Sinjar, be allocated to the KRG under the UN's internal boundary process. The son of the civil leader of the community echoed that request, adding that social services were better in the KRG. Both stressed the urgent need for economic development. End summary.

¶2. (C) As part of ongoing minority outreach efforts, PRT leader visited Lalesh, site of the holiest shrine of the Yezidi faith. We were hosted by His Holiness Khirto Hajee (referred to as the &Baba Sheikh8), hereditary religious leader of the community. We were also joined by Hazem Tahseen Seid, son of civil leader Prince Tahseen Beg, whose position is also hereditary. According to members of the religious and spiritual council, who were also present at the meeting, there are 700,000 Yezidis in Ninewa; we have no way of verifying that number. (Note: Other sources report a population of 500,000-600,000 Yezidis in Iraq. End Note.)

¶3. (C) Hajee said there was an urgent need for the Yezidi areas of Ninewa Province to join formally the KRG. He said that the Yezidis, who are ethnically and linguistically Kurdish, have enjoyed much greater security under Kurdish protection. (Note: Lalesh and most of northern Al-Shikhan district have been under de facto Kurdish control since the end of the first Gulf War.) There were several Kurdish government soldiers on the compound. Moreover, Hajee said, the Kurdish political parties have done a good job of representing Yezidi interests. In fact, a KDP politician arrived as our PRT was departing. Hajee added that his community, which has no missionary intent and refuses converts, is better off in a secular political system such as is evolving in the KRG.

¶4. (C) Hajee noted that Yezidis in Ninewa Province have been persecuted by what he termed as Islamic extremists. For instance, he said there are now no Yezidis in Mosul while the three Yezidi temples there have either been destroyed or converted into mosques. In addition, he emphasized the plight of the Yezidis in Sinjar district, who face both a security threat from extremists and economic hardships due to the ongoing drought.

¶5. (C) Throughout the four-hour visit, we stressed our vision of a democratic and secure Iraq, one in which all minority groups ) whether ethno-linguistic or confessional ) have both physical security and the protection of law. We noted that UN envoy di Mistura and others involved in the

issue of disputed internal boundaries had also been to Lalesh. At Hajee's direct personal request, PRT leader agreed to travel to Sinjar to meet the Yezidi community and hear their concerns.

16. (C) Comment: With roots in the Zoroastrian faith, the Yezidi are both a vibrant community of believers and an ancient living part of Iraq's cultural heritage. The Yezidi count 72 waves of genocidal violence against their community, starting with the Abbasids. Regardless of our views, the Lalesh Yezidis, belief that their security is best assured under the KRG is based on what they see as a tragic history. End Comment.

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